

AGENDA ITEM III C

PROPOSED NEW ACADEMIC PROGRAM

RIVER PARISHES COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Associate of General Science (CIP Code 24.0199)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

River Parishes Community College (RPCC) was chartered as a comprehensive community college by the Legislature in 1997 and opened in August, 1999. The College serves students primarily in Ascension, Assumption, St. James, and St. John Parishes. If approved, this degree would be among the first degrees offered at the institution.

STAFF SUMMARY

1. Description

The Associate of Science degree in General Science is designed for students who plan to transfer to a baccalaureate degree institution and major in one of the science or health professions or a related pre-professional area such as dentistry, medicine, pharmacy, optometry, physical therapy, nursing, physics, chemistry, or biological science. For students who do not chose to transfer, the curriculum may lead to employment in a health or science-related field or paraprofession. The 65 hours degree consists of general education requirements (29 hours), degree core requirements (18 credit hours in biology, chemistry or physics, and 6 in science, mathematics, or approved courses), 9 hours of “required related courses” in the humanities/social sciences/and computer sciences, and 3 hours of electives. Both semesters of at least two natural science courses must be completed with a C or better.

When this proposal was sent to other in-state institutions for comment, several reviewers expressed concern about the extent to which this degree’s coursework would be transferable to proximate institutions. When directed to supply more detail about transfer and articulation, the College replied as follows:

In our contacts with the universities to which our students will transfer, the receiving institutions have agreed to accept the crosswalk courses [listed in the Statewide General Education Articulation Matrix and the Business Matrix] and to examine the remainder of the student’s transcript case by case. In an effort to assist in that process, RPCC has visited LSU, Southern-BR, Southeastern, UNO, and Nicholls State to discuss student transfer issues. We have established a contact person in the admissions office at each institution, and we have left them a package of standard materials. When an RPCC student

transfers, we supply the receiving institution with copies of course outlines, syllabi, and the professor's credentials for their review. To our knowledge, we have successfully transferred students to all of the above as well as Northwestern and LSU-A.

2. Need

The College currently offers no degree programs to students of the four parishes it serves. The proposal notes that RPCC student registration patterns suggest that the new degree program “should in no way compete with Baton Rouge Community College’s General Science program” because the vast majority of students come from Ascension (not East Baton Rouge) parish. The proposed program is also designed to serve general education needs of LTC-Ascension and LTC-Reserve.

3. Students

Based upon high school graduate rates in RPCC’s service area, census data, and Board of Regents data, the College projects the following *overall* enrollment figures, approximately 63% of which, in any given year, represent FTE (full-time equivalence):

1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
250	500	750	1003	1368	1847

The College reports that its enrollment projections for the first two years have been substantiated. Of these students, the College estimates that approximately 9% of them will enroll in the General Science program. This estimate is based on a survey of current students and projections that high school students in the service area will not all meet selective admissions requirements at nearby four-year universities. The presence of local chemical industries may also drive some students to complete this degree.

4. Faculty

All courses for this degree are being taught by current full and part-time faculty whose primary responsibility is classroom/laboratory teaching. Among other responsibilities, full-time faculty teach 15 credit hours each semester and are required to hold published office hours. All faculty meet SACS criteria: they have completed at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline, hold at least a master’s degree, or hold a master’s degree with a major in the teaching discipline. The average student-faculty ratio for the College and this degree program is expected to be 24:1.

The College notes that “a Chemistry course, taught by an adjunct, was offered for the first time in Fall 2000. The College intends to fill a full-time Chemistry position in the Fall of 2001. Additional courses in the sciences will be taught by adjuncts for the coming year.” The staff further queried the College regarding the hiring of a full-time additional Physics faculty needed to support program coursework. The College indicates that such hires *will occur as needed*.

5. Library

The library collection was dedicated in January, 2001. RPCC contracted with a book vendor to purchase and catalog 4,000 volumes appropriate for the academic level and courses offered by the 2000-2001 academic year. The initial collection includes a basic reference collection as well as a core collection in the arts, sciences, and humanities. The Learning Resource Center (next to the library) is a member of the Louisiana Library Network (LOUIS) consortium, which provides faculty and students with electronic databases and access to indices, abstracts, and full-text journal articles. The College also participates in the Southeastern Library Network (Solinet), a non-profit library cooperative that provides resources for the southeastern U.S. and includes more than 800 institutions. Inter-library loans for students and faculty are secured through this participation, as well as through participation in OCLC, LALINC, and DEEDNet.

Based on current enrollment estimates, the College projects that library expenditures needed for the first five years of the proposed program will be:

2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
\$149,255	\$152,723	\$161,025	\$170,252	\$178,896

The College notes that “funding noted above will not by itself be sufficient to allow the library to accumulate 40,000 volumes within five years. The College will seek assistance from the Emerging College Fund or a special appropriation to secure additional funding for those acquisitions.” Moreover, the College projects a need for additional space to house the collection.

6. Facilities/Equipment

The newly-formed College occupies two buildings dedicated to teaching, administration, and student services. For the five hundred projected students in academic year 2000-01, there are five classrooms, two science labs, a large computer lab, and a learning center next to the library. Educational equipment, technology and furniture has been provided with \$700,000 in bond money. Some temporary office space is available for faculty, but at present all faculty members are housed in a separate, leased facility one mile from campus.

Reviewers noted a specific need for a physics laboratory. In response to this recommendation, the College indicated the following:

At the time we submitted our proposals, we only had two labs under construction (biology and chemistry). The latter would have shared space with physics. Since then, we have added a new building to our lease that will be finished in March, 2001. There are two teaching spaces in the building, and one can be dedicated to teaching physics. Moreover, we still are spending bond money to equip our laboratories, and physics equipment for the lab is already being purchased.

7. Administration

The proposal states that “the General Science program will be administered by the Vice Chancellor/Dean of Academic Studies. At the present time, RPCC is too small to be divided into departments or divisions. As the College expands, the program may be coordinated by a faculty member on re-assigned time.”

8. Accreditation

This program is not eligible for accreditation.

9. Costs

This degree will not require any unique or additional funding over and beyond that used to build the basic infrastructure of the College. Indeed, this degree is part of the basic infrastructure being built. The proposal states that “existing full and part-time faculty are already teaching the courses which comprise the College’s general education requirements and courses that will be used to fulfill all of RPCC’s initial degree programs. Bond money is being used to purchase educational furniture and equipment that will support all the College’s initial programs.” The base state appropriation for RPCC is \$1,500,000 per year. In addition, if the College meets its enrollment goals, tuition revenue is expected to establish the following minimum budget figures:

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Student head count	750	1013	1368	1847	2216
Total tuition	\$438,375	592,099	800,353	1,079,572	1,295,252
Total min. budget	\$1,938,375	2,092,099	2,300,353	2,579,572	2,795,252

STAFF ANALYSIS

RPCC’s choice to offer this degree is sensible, and the degree itself follows established curricular norms of its type. Current arrangements for establishing course articulation and student transfers appear satisfactory. Student interest in the program appears high. Faculty appear to be well-qualified, but additional science faculty in particular are needed to meet student and curricular demands. It is commendable that faculty offices are being made available on the campus itself and that the College is considering dedicated one of the new laboratory facilities to physics. The new library and learning resource center, connected as they are to other resources, still require greater financial support if they are to be adequate to projected increases in student enrollment. Proposed program administration is satisfactory. As the program consists solely of general education coursework offered by the College through a variety of academic departments, a separate program budget is probably impossible to determine. The staff believes, though, that general State appropriations for college operations (a

minimum of \$1,500,000) should be adequate to address program needs.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The staff recommends that the Academic and Student Affairs Committee grant approval for the request from River Parishes Community College to establish an Associate of Arts in Liberal Arts program (CIP Code 24.0199), effective June 1, 2001. By March 1, 2002, the College shall report to the Commissioner of Higher Education the status of full-time science faculty for the institution.